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ABSTRACT

This booklet is one in a series designed to bridge the gap between theory and practice by suggesting specific classroom activities based on current educational theory and research. Designed for elementary school teachers, it is divided into two sections. The first section discusses such topics as providing a healthy classroom environment for free expression; the various roles the teacher must play in encouraging children to write; evaluation; the learning center in the classroom; and the advantages of individualized writing instruction. The second section offers practical hints on such topics as organizing a writing center; developing a minicenter for focus on a specific writing activity; preparing task cards which allow a child to choose an activity to complete independently; making activity sheets for writing; creating learning modules for writing; and including open activities for writing. Specific games, activities, and topics, such as the thesaurus, address books, idioms, and free verse, are discussed and illustrated. (TS)

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THEORY INTO PRACTICE

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Individualizing Writing in the Elementary Classroom

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Foreword

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system developed by the U.S. Office of Education and now sponsored by the National Institute of Education. It provides ready access to descriptions of exemplary programs, research and development efforts, and related information useful in developing more effective educational programs.

Through its network of specialized centers or clearinghouses, each of which is responsible for a particular educational area, ERIC acquires, evaluates, abstracts, indexes, and lists current significant information in its reference publications.

The ERIC system has already made available—through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service—much informative data, including all federally funded research reports since 1956. However, if the findings of specific educational research are to be intelligible to teachers and applicable to teaching, considerable bodies of data must be reevaluated, focused, translated, and molded into an essentially different context. Rather than resting at the point of making research reports readily accessible, NIE has directed the separate ERIC clearinghouses to commission from recognized authorities information analysis papers in specific areas.

In addition, as with all federal educational information efforts, ERIC has as one of its primary goals bridging the gap between educational theory and actual classroom practices. One method of achieving that goal is the development by the ERIC

Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (ERIC/RCS) of a series of sharply focused booklets based on concrete educational needs. Each booklet provides teachers with the best educational theory and/or research on a limited topic. It also presents descriptions of classroom activities which are related to the described theory and assists the teacher in putting this theory into practice.

This idea is not unique. Nor is the series title: *Theory Into Practice* (TIP). Several educational journals and many commercial textbooks provide teachers with similar aids. The ERIC/RCS booklets are unusual in their sharp focus on an educational need and their blend of sound academic theory with tested classroom practices. And they have been developed because of the increasing requests from teachers to provide this kind of service.

Topics for these booklets are recommended by the ERIC/RCS National Advisory Committee. Suggestions for topics to be considered by the Committee should be directed to the Clearinghouse.

Bernard O'Donnell
Director, ERIC/RCS

Theory

An experience isn't finished until it's written.

Ann Morrow Lindbergh

Children enjoy language from the first uncertain babblings through the gradual acquisition of greater facility and sophistication. As Hughes Mearns points out in *Creative Power* (1958), however,

> children are creative persons, not scholiasts; they use language as the artist the world over and in all ages has used his medium, not as an end in itself but as a means for the expression of thought and feeling. Language in itself, they sense, is comparatively unimportant; if the vision is steady and the feeling is true these will find their proper vehicle. The attention is never on the word but upon the force that creates the word. (p. 9)

How can teachers ensure that the children in their classrooms will continue to enjoy language as they experiment with expressing their ideas in writing? The first essential concern is providing a classroom climate that is psychologically conducive to free expression, a climate that is stimulating, yet accepting. Only children who are respected and encouraged will feel truly free to write.

From the very first writing experiences the teacher plays a crucial role in supplying positive reinforcement. This reinforcement can take the form of spoken words of encouragement directly to each individual young writer. Positive attitudes can be conveyed also through displaying student writing as something highly valued, by allocating time for sharing writing in small groups, or by publishing student work in a class booklet.

Evaluation of writing, too, must reflect this same positive attitude. As Lee Bennett Hopkins notes in *Let Them Be Themselves* (1974),

> children will only create and reveal their inner thoughts to a teacher who will accept them for what they are. When children write like this—when they create from their hearts—it is useless to take a red pencil from the desk drawer and correct spelling errors or misuse of grammar and punctuation. If teachers attempt this, they will not obtain creative responses the next time round; inner thoughts will be kept inside, and deep feelings will be turned into superficial sentences. (p. 89)

Evaluation, on the other hand, is a significant aspect of promoting growth in writing. The student should be involved in self-evaluation that can be shared with the teacher in periodic individual conferences. Although it is sometimes difficult, teachers need to step out of the way and let children learn by making mistakes. Teachers can learn to play a supportive role by being non-judgmental and showing appreciation for children's accomplishments.

A second important consideration in ensuring that children will enjoy language more and more as they develop their writing abilities is the need to individualize instruction. Writing is a skill that demands individualization, for each student writes from a unique background of psychological make-up, language development, and experiences. Individualized instruction is the only way to provide fully for these unique needs, for the individualized program means that the curriculum is student-centered. Students not only set their own pace, but they work on studies that they have helped to select. They may be working alone, in pairs, or in small groups of five or six students.

Finally, the teacher must provide a classroom that is conducive physically to free expression. A method that many teachers have found successful is the learning center, an area of the classroom that is set aside for a specific kind of learning activity. This approach to instruction has long been used in elementary school classrooms but is equally appropriate for junior and senior high school classrooms.

The learning center has many advantages. For one thing, the learning activities are more enjoyable than those associated with more traditional approaches. The interaction with other students is an important element of working in a learning center, for human beings are naturally social and working with peers is reinforcing and stimulating. Students become excited about the work they are doing and are self-motivated to continue.

In this case, the activity focuses on writing, although the other language arts skills are of necessity included in the process. For example, students who are writing a skit together will need to discuss their work, and they may need to read material on which to base their play; students who are learning to make books of their own will examine the format of various library books and will perhaps view the film *Story of a Book*, in which Holling C. Holling describes the development of his book *Pagoo* (Houghton Mifflin).

An essential aspect of individualized instruction that adds to student interest is self-selection. In the learning center students are able to choose from a variety of possibilities as they decide what they will write or which mini-center activity they would like to explore. If the students make these choices, they are more likely to be excited about learning; they do not need a teacher telling them what they *have* to do. Even young children learn to make plans for their projects, to make the appropriate decisions, and to assume responsibility for carrying them out.

The role of the teacher becomes that of a resource person, a facilitator, as students take the initiative in planning learning experiences. The teacher confers with each student individually about his or her plans and makes suggestions that the student can consider. Throughout the learning process, the teacher guides individual growth through support and encouragement and helps students engage in self-evaluation of individual writing or group projects.

Although the student assumes a much more responsible role in individualized instruction, the teacher still develops the curriculum and organizes for instruction. Instruction is no longer teacher-dominated, but the teacher has in mind clear objectives which can be stated in student-centered terms. General objectives would be concerned with the students' long-term goals—for example, gaining fluency in written language, learning to enjoy writing, and growing as individuals. More specific objectives would be designed to develop specific skills, such as the use of the comma or capitalization.

These objectives can appropriately be discussed with students so that they too are in on the goals of instruction. Or perhaps they will have other objectives to suggest. Students involved in this way will be better able to evaluate their own individual progress.

Individualizing Writing in the Elementary Classroom is designed to aid the elementary school teacher who wishes to develop an individualized writing program. The section on

"Practice" gives specific directions for setting up a learning center for writing and mini-centers that focus on specific concepts.

Suggestions for developing task cards which involve children in individual skill development as well as small group activities that are equally important for individual growth are also included. In addition, the teacher will discover many possibilities for enriching learning through the creative activity sheets that are described and others that the teacher can develop. These permit students to select the activities that they find most interesting.

Yet another exciting, but less well known, way of approaching individualized instruction, the learning module, is explained and several examples are provided for use in the classroom. What is more important, however, is that teachers can easily make other modules specific to their curriculum needs simply by following the directions given.

Finally, the booklet describes a number of open activities that stimulate writing by giving students a degree of anonymity they do not find in most of their writing activities, thus freeing them from inhibitions.

A well-developed plan is not necessary to begin individualized instruction. Below are several ideas that can be put into practice quickly by teachers who want their students to begin experiencing individualized learning as soon as possible:

1. Plan a writing center with your class. Begin right away with what you have on hand.
2. Set up one or two easy mini-centers selected from those described.
3. Copy several task cards to begin your file based on those suggested here.
4. Duplicate three or four activity sheets that children can choose from to motivate individual writing.
5. Begin duplicating one of the modules provided.

From that point, the teacher can easily add a few new ideas each week as she or he develops the program. The change in the classroom atmosphere will soon become evident. It will be an exciting atmosphere in which children are highly motivated to try new ideas and to share the results of their writing experiences with their classmates and their teacher.

Practice

Organizing a Writing Center

One of the most popular of learning centers is the writing center, because writing is by its very nature highly individualized. Children writing on the same topic always produce something different; they all write according to their own abilities and at their own rate of speed. Children enjoy the imaginative activities and the wide variety of things they can do in the writing center, which can be developed in conjunction with a reading center or with a language arts center in which all language skills are emphasized.

Talk about developing the center with the students in your class. Not only will they enjoy being involved in the planning stages but they also have excellent ideas and may come up with some you never thought of. You need to consider a number of questions at this stage:

Where can the writing center fit in your classroom?

What equipment and supplies do you already have?

What other items can you obtain?

How can you develop activities that enable children to work independently?

Any corner of the classroom will serve as a writing center. Very little complicated or expensive equipment is necessary. The chief requirement is a large table with chairs where a number of students can work at one time. A round table is especially suitable.

Another helpful addition is a set of book shelves to hold books and other supplies needed to carry out the work of the writers using the center. You may already have built-in shelves, near which the table can be placed, or perhaps you can order a set of shelves. If not, an attractive set of shelves which you can rearrange at any time can be made from several pieces of inexpensive lumber. Support the shelves with bricks, concrete blocks, or large wooden blocks. Certain types of boxes in which supplies come can also serve as supports.

Even less expensive are bookcases made from orange crates or other wooden packing boxes. These shelves are very attractive when painted in bright colors by the students themselves as they help develop the writing center.

Most of the essential supplies for stocking the writing center are already available in your classroom:

___ Several dictionaries for children
___ A larger dictionary (college), if available
___ Magazines that contain pictures for cutting
___ Crayons and colored felt pens
___ Colored construction paper
___ White tablet paper or composition paper
___ White unlined paper (ditto paper)
___ Pencils and pens
___ A stapler
___ Rulers
___ A hole punch

Another interesting and motivating addition to a center is a typewriter. If you let your need be known, you may find that someone has one you can have for this worthwhile purpose. Students can ask at home, but you can also check various sources, such as the school purchasing agent. What happens, for example, to old typewriters used by high school typing classes? If any funds are available, you can buy a used machine.

Efforts can also be directed toward making the center attractive as well as functional. Again, student involvement pays off; remember that if it is "their" center, they will be more inclined to use it. A wastebasket is useful and can be constructed from a heavy cardboard box or ice cream carton painted or covered with contact paper or student artwork.

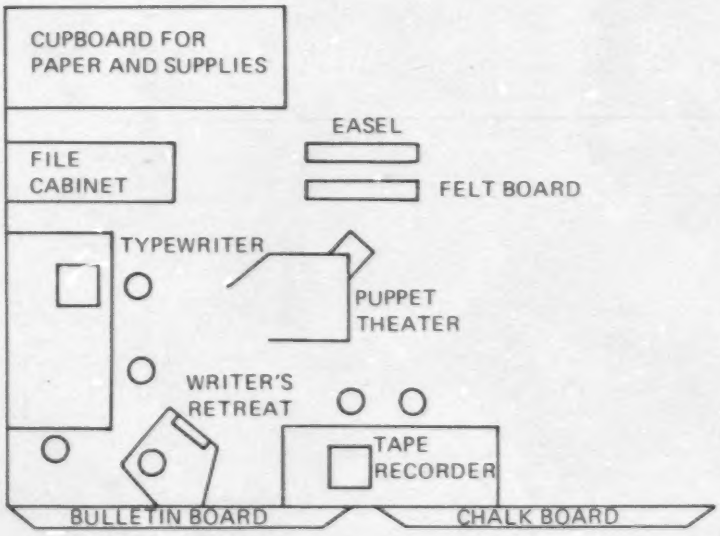
Screens are also helpful in setting the writing center apart from the rest of the classroom activity. Usually screens are composed of three sections that are hinged so the screen will fold. Here is a real opportunity for creative boys and girls to use

their ingenuity and their desire to "make things." Stimulate their creativity and their involvement in the classroom by letting each student who is interested submit working drawings for a screen, including a sketch of the finished product and a list of the materials to be used.

Perhaps those who are interested will want to look at various screens in stores as they explore the different possibilities. For example, panels can be solid (wood, Masonite, etc.) or they can be frames which are filled in with a different material. Sometimes cloth is stretched over the frame, or it is covered with decorative paper. The possibilities are numerous and inviting to the creative youngster. When the final choice is made, perhaps upper-grade students can help build the screen.

The writing center can continue to grow, develop, and be rearranged as the needs and interests of the class change but is ready to fulfill its purpose—to develop student writing abilities—from the very first day.

Below is a sample classroom arrangement that might be used for a writing center.[1]



[1] The description of the writing center and some of the mini-centers first appeared in the *Elementary Teachers Ideas and Materials Workshop* (Parker Publishing Company).

Developing a Mini-Center for Writing

An excellent individualized approach, the mini-center focuses on a single activity which children can participate in as they choose. The special feature of the mini-center is that it is changed frequently. After one or two weeks, interest will begin to wane. Described here are several ideas for mini-centers that you can set up in your classroom even if you don't have much space.

Mini-Center 1: The Touch Box

The Touch Box contains a hidden object. The children can write about what they think is in the box and describe the textures of the object they feel but cannot see. Then they can go on to story or poem writing with this object as a starter. The Touch Box can be made from an ordinary shoe box. Cut a hole in the front of the box big enough for a child to reach inside to feel the object. Sew or staple a sleeve around the hole so the child cannot see what is inside the box. Write "Touch Box" on the lid. Print instructions for this mini-center with a felt pen on a 12" by 18" sheet of paper or tagboard as shown below:

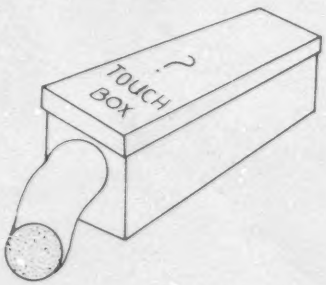
The Touch Box

Put your hand in the box.

Feel what is inside.

What do you think it is?

Write your answer on a sheet of paper. Tell what the THING looks like.



After a week, open up the box. What is it—a little Halloween witch? A funny-shaped sweet potato? A sock loosely stuffed with small trinkets? Let children discuss their guesses.

Mini-Center 2: The Big Book

Prepare a big book with a title on the cover in which all children have a chance to write. Sample titles are:

A Scary Night	Poems on the Seasons
My Favorite Cartoon	A Bicentennial Notebook
You'd Never Believe It	A Weekend Trip
And Then I Woke Up	Vacation Time

The instruction poster might read as follows:

A Scary Night

Choose a page in the Big Book
Write the title of your story
on the top line.
Write your name on the second
line.
Then write your story.
Use your imagination.

Mini-Center 3: The Question Man

Children love to express their opinions. Have a new question each week and a different person in charge of the poll taking. Each Friday during the evaluation session have the poll taker submit the findings. Children who are taking the survey can prepare a sheet on which to record the data collected:

Title of Poll: _____

Interviewer _____

Name	*Yes*	*No*	*Undecided*	*Don't Know*

Mini-Center 4: An Address Book

Let your children write their names in alphabetical order, along with addresses, telephone numbers, and birthdays, in an address book. If a child is ill for an extended period of time, the other children can make a get-well card and send it. For a birthday, someone at the writing center can make a birthday card.

The address book can be extended to include a full page, "All about Me," for each child. On this page children can include anything they like—drawings, photographs, a list of the members of their family, places they have lived, and so on. A page might look like the one below.

My name is _____ .
I live at _____ .
in _____ .
My telephone number is _____ .
I was born on _____ .

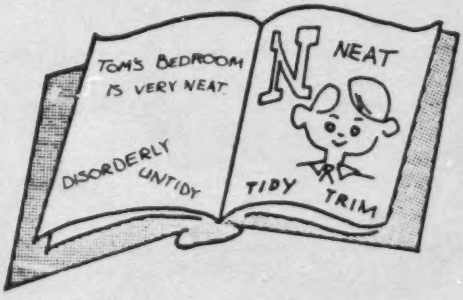
Me Mom Dad

( ) Our car
My pet, ___ .

Other facts about me:

Mini-Center 5: A Thesaurus

Discuss with your class what a thesaurus is and have the class write their own. Assign one letter of the alphabet to each child and have that youngster be responsible for several words beginning with that letter. Along with the word have the definition, a sentence to show context meaning, synonyms, antonyms, and an illustration to accompany the word. Have each child submit a word or words and bind the pages into an attractive folder for the writing center.



Preparing Task Cards for Writing

Task cards are designed to permit a child to choose an activity to complete independently. Children do not write on a task card. Task cards can focus on any language skill and may direct a child to complete a related art or music activity. Prepare each of these sets of instructions on a card. Use 5" x 8" file cards for older students, but larger cards cut from tagboard for primary students. Special sets of cards can be prepared to develop group activities. Children can work in small groups ranging from two to five or six as they prepare a play or write a book together. Below are a few ideas to get started.

Task Card 1: Thank You

The front of the card will contain instructions. The back of the card will look something like the card below.

1. Write a list of things you are thankful for.
2. Make a poster like the one on the back of this card. Show the things you have listed.
3. Pin your poster on the bulletin board.

Task Card 2: Finding Words

Write the following instructions on this card.

NOVEMBER

How many words can you find in this word? Write *November* at the top of a sheet of paper. Then write as many words as you can find. Remember the rules: Use each letter only as often as it appears in the word (a word can have only one *o* or one *n*, but it can have two *e*'s.) Proper names count, but not plurals.

Here are some words to get you started. Do you know what they are?

on	bore	ember
no	oven	venom

When you finish this task, place your paper in the folder marked NOVEMBER.

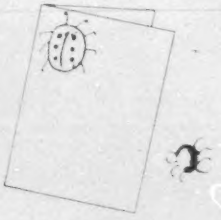
After a number of children finish this task, have them work in groups to compare the words they found. This is a profitable vocabulary building activity, not a competition. Develop other similar cards, for example, using holiday words: Valentine's Day, Christmas Day, Washington, Thanksgiving, or Saint Patrick.

Task Card 3: Buggy Notepaper

This card explains how to make interesting notepaper to stimulate interest in letter writing.

BUGGY NOTEPAPER

Here's a fast and easy way to make notepaper. Simply dip the ball of your thumb into poster paint and press it on a piece of pre-cut and pre-folded paper. After this is repeated on several sheets of paper and the thumb-prints are allowed to dry, it's time to change the prints into bugs. This is easily done with black poster paint or India ink and a brush or pen; a line down the center to indicate the wingcase, several spots, six legs, and antennae will do the trick.

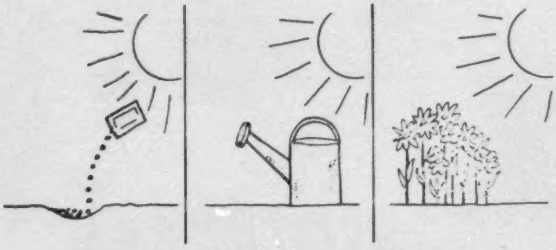


Making Activity Sheets for Writing

Activity sheets are usually duplicated in quantity, and a folder for each activity is kept in a file cabinet. The duplicating master should be placed at the back of the folder so the supply can be replenished as needed. Here are a few sample activity sheets to develop writing.

Activity Sheet 1: Growing Seeds

Copy these pictures at the top of a duplicating master.



You may wish to add a few questions below these pictures to help students get started with a story based on the pictured sequence.

Ask questions to elicit responses from children, thus:

What is shown in each of the pictures?
What kind of seeds do you think they are?
What time of year is it?
Do you think the ground is dry?
What does a seed need to grow?

This sequence will probably result in rather factual accounts of what has happened. Questions can, however, help children think beyond the bare facts presented. For example,

Who bought the seeds?
Whose sprinkling can is in the second picture?
What will they do with the flowers?
What kinds of flowers grow from seeds?
What color are the flowers?
Do they smell good?

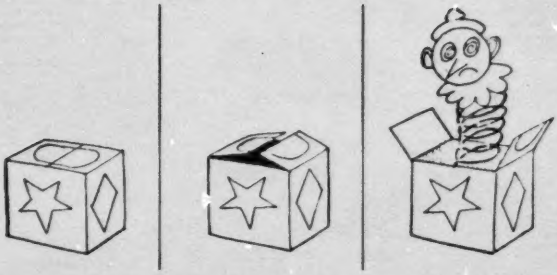
Activity Sheet 2: Butterflies

Prepare this sheet to follow Activity Sheet 1. Suggest that children write their own questions to think about before writing the story.

Activity Sheet 3: Jack-in-the-Box

Children who have written stories based on the first two sequences will welcome this one.

Start a Big Book of stories entitled "Jack-in-the-Box" in which children can place all of their completed stories. Place this book of stories on the reading table where children can enjoy reading their friends' stories.



Activity Sheet 4: Idioms

Nothing is as fascinating to children as the study of their own language once they become aware of it. The idioms of English provide interesting approaches to language studies. There are many idioms that can be used as topics for discussion at each of the grade levels. For example, prepare a sheet that begins like this:

Think carefully about these expressions.
What picture comes to your mind as you think about the words?

I could eat a horse!
They buried the hatchet.
His mind was completely empty.
They dropped her from the membership list.

How many more expressions like this can you list?

Activity Sheet 5: Idioms

A follow-up study of idioms might begin thus:

Read these expressions:

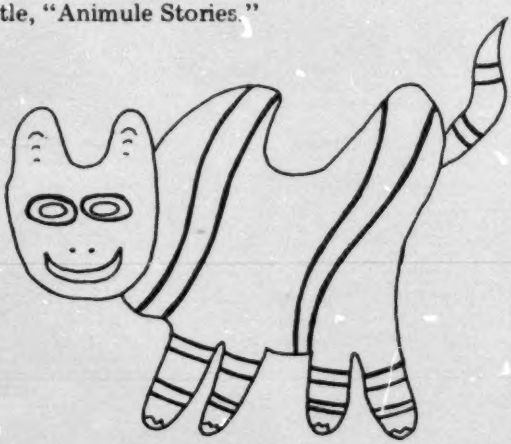
They were chewing the fat.	The old man kicked the bucket.
The teacher beat around the bush.	His friends left him in the dust.
He tooted his own horn.	Jim is always on the fence.

These expressions are called *idioms*. Choose one of these idioms. Draw a funny picture based on the words in the expression you chose. Print the idiom below the picture and display the picture on the bulletin board so everybody can enjoy it.

Later, put idioms on sheets of paper and have the students pick one from a box or hat. The students draw a picture based on the idiom, and the other students try to guess what the idiom is.

Activity Sheet 6: The Animule

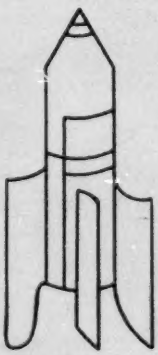
Below is a funny "story starter" that children will enjoy. The verse invites young writers to tell the story of this strange animal as they let their imaginations play with ideas. Completed stories can be included in a book on which this *animule* appears with the title, "Animule Stories."



Activity Sheet 7: The Rocket

Place this rocket at one side of a duplicating master. At the top of the page print these words:

Taking off to Venus! What will you see when you land? What will you do?



Include lines on which to begin the story. Children can complete their story on the back of the sheet.

Creating Learning Modules for Writing

The modules presented here require more preparation than do task cards or activity sheets. To begin with, develop the following modules as examples. Then have upper-grade students research information that can be used to prepare additional learning modules that focus, for example, on writing various forms of poetry.

Learning Module 1: Idioms (by Nancy Kefauver)

When you greet someone *you* might say, "How do you do?" A Frenchman would say, "How do you carry yourself?" A German would say, "How does it go with you?" These are all examples of idiomatic expressions. An idiomatic expression is a group of words that has a particular meaning because speakers of the language have agreed that it will have that meaning, *not* because the words taken separately add up to that agreed-upon meaning. Someone who is learning English as a second language would have a hard time figuring out that "jumping out of my skin" means that one is frightened or "letting the cat out of the bag" means revealing a secret. It takes a great deal of time to learn the particular meanings of the idiomatic expressions in our language.

Idioms can be made more meaningful if one knows how they originated. Because of much usage, the phrase "raining cats and dogs" has meaning for us, but did you know that it was first used many years ago because sailors once believed that cats had a great deal to do with storms and that dogs and wolves symbolized the wind? People would use this expression when there was a particularly violent rainstorm. Have you heard or used the expression "mad as a hatter"? How do you suppose that was started?

If an idiomatic expression is taken at face value, this would be the *literal meaning.* The literal meaning of "in the doghouse," for example, conjures up an amusing image of an unhappy person peering through the doorway of Rover's retreat. It does seem like a more colorful way of speaking, doesn't it? The accepted meaning, of course, is "in trouble."

Assignment: Listen carefully to the language of your friends, family, and teachers. Make a list of the idiomatic expressions you hear them use. Also explain the literal and the accepted meanings. After you have a list of from 10 to 15 expressions, begin trying to find out how some of these expressions came about. Share your results with the class. If you have had

difficulty discovering the origin of an expression, perhaps your classmates can help you.

Learning Module 2: Writing Free Verse

Free verse is a form of poetry that is free from certain limits placed on other poetry. Free verse can be as long or as short as the poet wishes. There is no rhyme in free verse, although there is usually rhythm. The poet concentrates on fresh images or pictures and the use of language in interesting ways. The poet is very much interested in expressing original ideas. Some poets who write free verse are Hilda Conkling, Carl Sandburg, Walt Whitman, and e. e. cummings.

The following poem by Walt Whitman talks about miracles. As you read this poem, pay close attention to the language and the many pictures this great American poet paints with words.

Nothing Else But Miracles

Why, who makes much of a miracle?
As to me I know of nothing else but miracles
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,
Or stand under trees in the woods,
Or talk by day with any one I love. . . .
Or sit at table at dinner with the rest,
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car.
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer forenoon,
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining so quiet and bright,
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in spring;
These with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.
To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.
To me the sea is a continual miracle,
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the waves—the ships with men in them,
What stranger miracles are there?

The emphasis in free verse is on fresh ideas and images. Have you ever heard someone say, "He's as quiet as a mouse"? This expression brings an image to mind, but it is an old, worn out image that was once fresh. We call this kind of overworked expression a cliché (clee-shay), which is a word we have borrowed from the French language.

Can you think of fresh ideas about *quiet*? Try writing a poem like this:

What is quiet?

Quiet is . . .
a feather floating through the air
a fly eating pancakes
two butterflies talking.

Quiet is . . .

_____

_____

_____

You can make the poem as long as you like because free verse can be any length. Other comparisons can be explored in the same way: whiteness, slowness, quickness, redness.

Have you ever head anyone say that someone was "as slow as a snail"? What are other comparisons for slowness. Think of fresh, original ideas that others will not have in mind, for example,

As slow as . . .
a person reading a book you want to read
the clock on the day before Christmas
a boy walking home with an *F* paper
a sleepy kitten's purr
the tolling of a church bell.

Make a poster display featuring one of these comparisons. "As soft as . . ." might be the caption used with a piece of velvet, a picture of a baby, a rose, a real feather, and other items suggested by the children. "As hard as . . ." might be the words used with ideas about hardness—a person's face, a jagged peak, an enormous sledge hammer, a strong man's muscular arm.

Here is another short poem written in free verse.

Rabbit

Black against the tree roots
He sits quietly unseen.
Thump, thump—
A barking dog is heard.
Where has the rabbit gone?

Iris Tiedt

Assignment: Write a poem about an animal that you like. Follow the pattern of the poem above, which is only five lines long. Add another set of five lines if you have more ideas to include about the animal.

Learning Module 3: What's in a Word (by Nancy Kefauver)

You use words all the time, to speak and to write, but have you ever wondered where the words you use so freely came from, how they first came to be used? Every word has a story behind it. Our English language wasn't developed overnight. It has a history, just as our country has a history. In her book *The First Book of Language and How to Use It*, Mauree Applegate says this about language:

> **Our language is the story of America itself. It is a glorious mixture from many nations. The words of kings, of freemen, and of slaves are in it. It has been fashioned from the sweat and dreams of farmers, sailors, cowboys, steelworkers, weavers, traders. It wears the mark of doctors, of teachers, of men of God, of lawyers, of scientists.**
>
> **It is so rich a language that it can express the great thoughts of great men, yet it is so simple that it can whisper the dreams of a child.**
>
> **It is so beautiful a language that it can conjure up the sound of the wind in the pines, and catch the happiness of a summer day.**
>
> **It is the voice of democracy. It is your language, yours to have and to hold, yours to enrich, yours to respect, yours to protect, and above all, yours to use as well as you know how.**

In this lesson you will learn about several words in our language and how they originated. Then you will be doing some investigating on your own.

Many of our words came to us from other languages. Our word *word* is an old English word. When you refer to the different parts of your face, you are using the modern form of the Old English words for *eye*, *nose*, *mouth* and *chin*. *Hospital* came from the Latin word *hospes* meaning "guest" and was so

named because a long time ago it was a place where monks cared for sick guests traveling to the Holy Land. Other words from the Latin word are *hospitality* and *hostess*. Can you think of another related word? *History* came from the Greek *histor* meaning "knowing" and means a record of what we know about the past. The word *perform* came to us from two French words—*par* (completely) and *fournir* (to finish). When you perform, you carry through with something. A person giving a performance wishes to do the best or most finished acting she or he can do.

Some of our words for foods and other articles originated from the names of places where the foods were grown or the articles were first made. *Hamburger* came to us from Hamburg, Germany; *cheddar* came from England; *roquefort* from France—all names of cities. *Tweed* is the name of a famous river in Scotland, and the *bungalow* was named after a river in Bengal, India, where this type of house was first built.

Many of our flower names came from the last names of people with "ia" added at the end. One example is *poinsettia*, named after Joel R. Poinsett, first United States minister to Mexico, who discovered the flower and brought it to the U.S. Some others are *begonia*, *camellia*, and *gardenia*. Other flowers were named for what they seem to look like, such as *jack-in-the-pulpit*, *sunflower*, and *shooting star*.

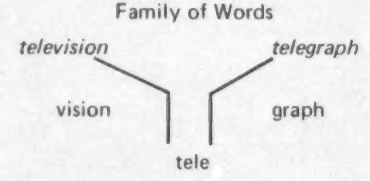
Names of people have given us words. Blind inventor Louis Braille, a Frenchman, invented the system that enables the blind to read. Louis Pasteur, a French chemist, discovered the process we now call *pasteurization*. And, of course, it was the Earl of Sandwich who wished to hasten through his dinner hour one evening, so he asked to have a piece of meat brought to him between two slices of bread. Thus we have a *sandwich*.

A living language like English has a constant demand for new words. Science and technology add new terms to our language. Latin and Greek roots are one of the most plentiful sources of new words. Below is a root and two words and their meanings. Read them and then you will understand how the words in the accompanying diagram came to be.

root: tele (at a distance)

words: vision (seen)

graph (writing or written)



Assignment: Find out how *at least 5* other words became part of our English language. Be ready to share your results with the class. Look for unique stories. You can use a good dictionary and/or any of these books (or others) in our library: Isaac Asimov, *Words from History* (Houghton Mifflin, 1968); Julie F. Batchelor, *Communication: From Cave to Television* (Harcourt Brace, 1953); Samuel and Beryl Epstein, *The First Book of Words* (Watts, 1954); Charles E. Funk and Charles E. Funk, Jr., *Horsefeathers and Other Curious Words* (Harper & Row, 1958); and Maxwell Nurnberg, *Wonders in Words* (Prentice-Hall, 1968).

Including Open Activities for Writing

One of the most interesting side results of having students write is that teachers get better acquainted with their students. Not everyone will be brave enough to tell the teacher things aloud; there actually isn't much opportunity for this type of close relationship with individual children. Everyone, however, has a chance to express their feelings and thoughts when the teacher encourages writing through use of the following activities, which allow the children a certain sense of anonymity that frees them from inhibitions.

Open Activity 1: The Log

The keeping of a daily log is an excellent device to motivate student writing. Set aside a specific time when all students will write for about ten minutes. Individuals may later write more if they wish, but each must write for the specified time each day. Introduce the keeping of a log by describing the way a ship captain keeps a daily log of the activities aboard the ship during a trip. Each child may purchase a spiral notebook to use as a log or you can make booklets for this purpose.

What do they write about? No specific assignments are made. The writing is not meant to be a story. Any thoughts can be explored—reactions to events that happen inside or outside the classroom, things that puzzle a child, things that are liked or disliked, a simple relating of something that happened:

September 15th

On the way to school I saw two brothers walking along. They live next to us. Ronnie is the littlest and he has something wrong with his leg. He can't run very well. Sometimes the kids make fun of him and he cries.

I was just thinking. I'm glad to be healthy. If you aren't healthy, it must be hard to be happy.

Logs are never graded for the quality of writing produced, for what could be more inhibiting? The booklets should, however, be read periodically by the teacher as a way of communicating with each individual child. The teacher may wish to read about half of the logs each week, writing a note to each child at the end of his or her writing. The teacher should comment on the child's ideas, perhaps sharing an idea or experience; remarks are designed to improve self-image and to let the child know that the teacher thinks he or she is an important person.

Open Activity 2: Talking Books

Similar to the keeping of the log is the use of a "talking book." We have observed this idea being used in both second and sixth grades. Young children especially respond to the idea of "talking" with their teacher through writing of notes or letters kept in individual talking books. One shy child wrote the following:

> **Mom spanked me this morning because I spilled jelly all over the floor. She kissed me anyway and waved goodby.**

Spelling errors there were, of course, but the important thing is that the child was learning to use writing as a way of communicating. He turned in his talking book to his teacher, who wrote:

> **I got spanked once for spilling a whole bottle of milk! Imagine! Your mother sounds nice. Do you have any brothers and sisters?**

Notice that the teacher has been very careful to comment on the idea presented by the child. The teacher shares a similar experience, comments about the boy's mother, whom he obviously loves, and then asks a question. This question is important, for it helps the child begin writing again. It serves to continue the "conversation."

Talking books are usually made by the children. Cutting 8½" x 11" paper in half makes a good size. The children can make interesting covers for their books. Books like these that will be used frequently can be sprayed with clear plastic to prevent smearing of tempera paint on the cover.

This two-way conversation is especially helpful in working with young children who are learning to read as well as with disadvantaged children who need an extra amount of reading and writing. The children are highly motivated to write messages and are equally eager to read what the teacher writes.

By repeating words the children misspell, the teacher can also help to improve their spelling.

Older children may be encouraged to vary this activity by carrying on "conversations" with other students. Jim and Susan, for example, might be interested in "talking" together. Thus, the writing is encouraged, but the teacher is not burdened with writing lengthy replies, which might be required with more able writers. The teacher-student exchange should not be entirely eliminated, however, for there is no better way to establish rapport with individual students. Alternate the approaches to take full advantage of this technique.

Open Activity 3: Expanding Sentences

How long is a sentence? Challenge students to expand ordinary sentences by adding modifiers and clauses. Begin with one sentence and see who can make the longest sentence. Compare the varied methods used by different students.

Later you may wish to share this 111-word expanded sentence written by teacher Mary Jane Davis with your class. This sentence describes a trip from Spokane, Washington, to San Jose, California, where she spent the summer. The rules permit us to start with an idea which may be modified as the sentence expands. The basic sentence is *We sped.*

> Across the flat, barren, sage-brush covered land west of our home town, Spokane,—over the rolling, fertile, loess hills of the wheat-growing region of southwestern Washington,—between the banks of the awe-inspiring gorge of the mighty Columbia River,—through central Oregon with its majestic, snow-capped mountain peaks towering in the distance,—past shimmering Klamath Lake into the tortuous, spectacular terrain of northern California,—along the orchard-lined highways of the broad Sacramento Valley,—westward to the bustling, congested cosmopolis of the San Francisco Bay area, *we sped* over the asphalt ribbon to San Jose, our destination, the promised land of perpetual sunshine. I'm homesick!

Don't hesitate to use this idea with young children. Second graders won't produce 111-word sentences like this one, but you'll be surprised to see how their sentences will grow. From the noun-verb sentence *We ran,* they may be expected to write something like this:

> Tired and thirsty, we ran into the house to raid the refrigerator for lemonade, milk, and anything else that was wet.

Open Activity 4: Making Books in the Classroom

As children use the writing center, one of the natural activities that evolve is the construction of *books*. The format of the books varies greatly, however, and it is interesting to explore the possibilities for student-made books. The teacher's role should remain nondirective as long as children are self-motivated, but an occasional presentation of a stimulating new idea will renew interest in writing.

The Shape of Books. Let children discover variety in the shape of books. Sometimes this discovery takes place naturally as an inventive child experiments and others pick up the idea. A good group discussion will also serve to bring out interesting ideas. You might begin by simply asking children what the shape of a book is. Follow this by asking them if they have ever seen any books that were a little bit different.

Gradually some generalizations will be established regarding size and shape. Books vary in thickness, some being only a few pages, while others are impressively long. You might show the group a novel of 800 pages or more just to extend their experience with books. Books are also usually rectangular in shape with some quite large, perhaps 8" x 10", others much smaller, perhaps only 4" x 5". Measuring a few books will establish a commonly used size. It is interesting to have a variety of sizes and shapes to bring out during this discussion. Someone may even have one of the tiny mini-books that are sometimes sold as a novelty.

Why are books that are published consistently rectangular in shape? Why don't we have books that are triangular or circular in shape? The chief reason that can be elicited, of course, is mass production. A discussion of how books are produced will lead into the possibility of the children publishing their own books.

Since these classroom authors are producing single copies of their books, they are not limited by the need to conform to a standard size and shape. If they want to, they can publish their books in any unusual shape that might occur to them—a ball, a glove, a box, a hat, and so on. The book cover can reflect the contents of the story that they have written. The ideas for covers will serve to motivate the writing of stories so that children will produce some imaginative results.

Another fascinating shape for children's "books" is the scroll. The child's story can be of any length as sheets of white paper are glued together to make a long strip.

The stiff backs of magazines can be rolled easily to provide the ends needed for the scroll. Each end of the story sheet is glued around the rolled magazine cover. The whole story can then be rolled up and tied with a ribbon or colored yarn.

The Content of Books. As the children make their own books, they will become more aware of the parts that make up a book. Again, lead a discussion about this topic so that questions can be asked and points clarified. For example, are the contents of a fiction book the same as the contents of a nonfiction book? How do they differ?

By examining books the children will become aware of the make-up of a title page, which contains not only the title and author but also the publisher and the location of that publisher. The class may decide to invent a name for their publishing house, for instance, The Classroom Press, so that books produced will bear this name. The children will also become aware of the reverse side of the title page where the copyright information appears.

If each child has a library book on his or her desk as this discussion begins, each one can refer to the book as information is compared. Some books have a table of contents, while others do not. Some picture books may not even have a formal title page, although the copyright information will be somewhere on the book, perhaps in the lower corner of the inside cover.

This discussion helps children become more aware of books. How does a table of contents help the reader? Why is an index an important part of an informational book? Why is it not considered necessary in a fiction book? Why do some books have chapters? How does an author decide about making chapters?

Students from fourth grade up will enjoy seeing the excellent film about the writing and publishing of a book, *Story of a Book* (Churchill Films). In this short colored film, Holling C. Holling describes his work on the exciting story of *Pagoo* (Houghton-Mifflin, 1957). He makes the production of a book something stimulating and desirable, something he obviously enjoys doing. The actual publication process is also explained.

Students can become aware, too, that the books they make may contain a wide variety of content as they become aware of varied literary *genre*. Perhaps they will want to "publish" a book containing their own poetry or short stories, or they may wish to try nonfiction.

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Other Titles in the Theory into Practice (TIP) Series

Instruction in and about Small Group Discussion by Kathleen Galvin and Cassandra Book. Designed to help the teacher accustom students to the sort of constructive interaction for problem solving and other ends that is becoming increasingly important in school as well as in students' later lives. 1975. (ERIC/RCS and SCA) SCA members $1.40, nonmembers $1.50.*

Introduction to Film Making by Robert E. Davis. Presents techniques that can be used for film making activities with a minimum of equipment by students of many grade and ability levels; directs the teacher through activities from preplanning a production to final editing. 1975. (ERIC/RCS and SCA) SCA members $1.40, nonmembers $1.50.*

Nonverbal Communication in the Elementary Classroom by John M. Wiemann and Mary O. Wiemann. Discusses aspects of nonverbal behavior which can be used by teachers and also should become part of the student's repertoire of self-expression, and offers a series of classroom exercises for exploring nonverbal communication. 1975. (ERIC/RCS and SCA) SCA members $1.40, nonmembers $1.50.*

Observing and Writing by George Hillocks, Jr. Discusses the lack of specificity in writings of students at all levels; describes activities to surmount this problem by increasing students' powers as observers and recorders of sensory experience. 1975. (ERIC/RCS and NCTE) NCTE Stock No. 33967, members $1.00, nonmembers $1.10.

Theater Games: One Way into Drama by James Hoetker. Offers the teacher who lacks workshop experience in conducting creative dramatics a series of basic activities with which to begin. Gives suggestions to help teachers shift from the role of dispenser of information to that of a facilitator who learns along with the students. 1975. (ERIC/RCS and NCTE) NCTE Stock No. 53623, members $1.00, nonmembers $1.10.

*Available from the Speech Communication Association, 5205 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, Virginia 22041. Also available from NCTE at the same price (Galvin and Book, Stock No. 23481; Davis, Stock No. 23694; Wiemann and Wiemann, Stock No. 33614).